

Modernism, Deception, and Musical Others: Los Angeles circa 1940

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I do not attach so much importance to being a musical boggy-man as to being a natural continuer of properly understood, good old tradition!

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG TO WERNER REINHART, 1923

In a short essay on the nature and implications of postmodernity, Jean-François Lyotard neatly labels the opposing axes between which the development of high-culture modernism has often been charted as an ethical, implicitly political project. Artists who aspire to be progressive and "authentic" must "question the rules . . . as learnt and received from their predecessors": "They soon find that such rules are so many methods of deception, seduction and reassurance which make it impossible to be 'truthful.'"¹ To agree with those rules, Lyotard suggests, has been to affirm the way things are and embark upon an evasively therapeutic career in "mass conformism." The nonconformists' path of progressive modernism is noble but comfortless; those artists who persistently question the rules "are destined to lack credibility in the eyes of devoted adherents of reality and identity, to find themselves without a guaranteed audience."²

The more elaborate version of this model developed by Theodor Adorno, in his writings on music and aesthetics, drew upon complicatedly mediated historical attitudes. As an instrument, theory is itself, of course, historical, selecting and foregrounding evidence in a manner that may ideologically reinscribe what it seeks to explain. Opposition to traditional or academic norms does appear to have linked an extensive body of fin-de-siècle European artists and their heirs: the more aggressively politicized avant-gardistes of the 1920s and beyond. The use of this model as a historical tool is now, however, deeply problematic. Criticizing oversimplified interpretations of the history of European and American modernism, postmodernism has sought to restore the complicating nuances of difference within fields of cultural activity that Adorno, for example, often treated as unitary—such as popu-

lar entertainment. Also crucial to a significant strand of such analysis has been an examination of the grounds and implications of what Andreas Huyssen has labelled the "Great Divide" between modernism and mass culture.³ Huyssen provocatively interpreted the latter as the discursively compromising "other" of modernism, rather in the way that modernism itself had typically been positioned as an opposing alternative to traditional cultural assumptions about art. The purpose of highlighting such discursive strategies is to understand more about the concerns of those who use them and, as a consequence, reconsider their historical narratives.

My specific aim here is to bring these two projects together in an exploration of how we might extend the critique of the dominant narrative of modernism still further into the territory of twentieth-century music, particularly that of two of its canonic representatives: Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg. Their ideas and creative practice were elaborately marked by the network of contradictions that ensnared an unlikely and disparate group of composers who, late in their lives, in the 1930s and 1940s, found themselves living in close proximity in Los Angeles. They were émigrés, uprooted from their native environments, who had been brought together by the upheavals of European and Russian politics. All suffered the experience of finding themselves outsiders in a foreign land for which they had varying degrees of respect. [All perceived themselves as representatives of a "high" artistic culture in whose techniques and values they had been trained.] Their relations with tradition, modernism, and mass entertainment nevertheless prove sufficiently confused to undermine standard accounts of the historical triumph of modern music. [In the Los Angeles mirror-hall of otherness, where most were foreign, few "at home," the search for both cultural authority and authentic modes of opposition proves instructively confusing. Dogmatic preconceptions rear up like distorted monsters before shrinking humorously into midgets; heroes wobble, while the mocked grow touching in contemplation of their own strangeness.]

PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS: RACHMANINOV AND STRAVINSKY

In 1939, while still in Europe, although long an exile from his native Russia, Sergei Rachmaninov had responded to a request from an American journal that he contribute to a symposium on modern music. Two years before he was finally to settle in Beverly Hills, Rachmaninov's letter was a cry from the heart. As a composer whom history seemed to have left behind, his personal sense of artistic otherness reflected the literal alienation of a man whose homeland had become a lost and inaccessible place:

I feel like a ghost in a world grown alien. I cannot cast out the old way of writing, and I cannot acquire the new. I have made intense effort to feel the mu-

sical manner of today, but it will not come to me. . . . Even with the disaster of living through what has befallen the Russia where I spent my happiest years, yet I always feel that my own music[,] and my reactions to all music, remained spiritually the same, unendingly obedient in trying to create beauty. . . .⁴

This is not to be confused with immanent, intramusical evidence of alienation of the kind sought by Adorno, who located in art a suprapersonal "truth-content," reflecting rifts within society. It is simply a document of the personal *experience* of alienation, both geographical and cultural. It has been taken to be indicative of an anti-modernist position that the works reinforced. Adorno, indeed, unequivocally positioned Rachmaninov the composer as a representative of "old" cultural values in their most commodified and debased form.⁵

American reviews of the few late compositions that he managed to complete between his gruelling recital-tours as a virtuoso pianist opposed each other on ostensibly predictable grounds. Conservative critics reacted either with warmth or a rueful sense of déjà vu. Progressive critics were more likely to respond with anger to what they regarded as manifestations of sterility and irrelevance. Only Rachmaninov's celebrity as a pianist, they implied, gained attention for works that were pale reflections of long-ago favorites like the Prelude in C-sharp Minor (1892) or the Second Piano Concerto (1901). The notoriously progressive music critics of New York dealt characteristically with the first performance there of his last work, the Symphonic Dances, early in 1941. Louis Biancolli's review in the *New York World Telegram* seems to have been representative in its description of the work as "long and derivative," its occasionally weird effects suggesting to him a "rendezvous of ghosts": "Of course Mr Rachmaninoff does what he wants with the orchestra. His arsenal of effects is large and can send shivers quivering down the length and breadth of the string section. But the work sounds like a rehash of old tricks. . . ."⁶

Should we take this, along with Rachmaninov's own sense of being a "ghost in a world grown alien," as evidence that in America, at least, the modernist narrative is historically accurate, that its project had succeeded? Had old-style tonal music, with its latent realist tendency to programmatic representation, nothing more to say in a world where the art had demonstrably "progressed"? The tension that exists in Adorno's later writing on music—between his consistent approach to Schoenberg as exemplifying the dialectical challenge of dissonant "new music," and his similarly admiring treatment of Mahler—resounds in this question.⁷ Much depends upon Biancolli's dogmatic belief in allusion-rejecting "originality." To question such a belief might be to find in his review material for a more complex reading of the Symphonic Dances. Could not their allusions and rhetorically stressed, "haunted" character be interpreted as integral to their meaning? Additional problems about pleasure clearly emerge in Biancolli's references to Rachmaninov's "arsenal of

effects" and "old tricks." These barely conceal an antipopulist feeling that often emerged in American treatment of Rachmaninov's later works. Writing about the widely successful 1934 Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Robert Simon, at the height of the Great Depression, made the following ironic point in his review of an early performance of the work under Bruno Walter: "The Rhapsody isn't philosophical, significant, or even artistic. It's something for audiences, and what our orchestras need at the moment is more music for audiences. More music for audiences means more audiences for music, and with sage apothegm, I conclude another salute to Mr. Rachmaninoff."⁸

The persistence of the discourse of artistic idealism in the land of Disney and popcorn was fully internalized by Rachmaninov, whose authentic artistic alienation was posthumously compromised by the film industry's frequent reliance on his style. Conservative and popular clearly meant "bad"; the dubious implications of his wide appeal were thus confirmed by the practice of a culture that seemed curiously at odds with itself. By comparison, his younger countryman, Igor Stravinsky, was much more judicious about establishing an alliance with matters of philosophy, significance, and art; he *had mastered* the new way of writing music and the discourse that supported it. As one of the most famous living representatives of "modern music," Stravinsky valued his image as a diametrically opposite kind of composer to Rachmaninov. The two became personally acquainted for the first time in Beverly Hills in 1942. Moved to fellow-feeling by the progress of the war in Europe, it was Rachmaninov who instigated their encounter, although the internalized sense of artistic inferiority to which I have referred almost overwhelmed his initiative:

I'm eager to meet someone whose family, like mine, is living over there, and with whom I could discuss ways to send money and other things. As I know how much Igor Fyodorovich has always disliked my compositions, even though he respects me as a pianist, and must know my attitude to modern music, I'm not sure whether I could invite him and his wife to my house—which I'd love to do—because I don't know how he would receive my invitation.⁹

Rachmaninov's assessment of Stravinsky's attitude toward him seems to have been more or less correct, but the invitation was accepted and subsequently returned.¹⁰

In the Los Angeles hall of mirrors, however, Stravinsky's position as an official *grand maître* of modern music also gave rise to a critical and contradictory image of his artistic personality and significance. The hostile gazer in this case was again Theodor Adorno, himself a Los Angeles immigrant, whose 1948 *Philosophy of New Music* contained what is still the most consistently negative critique of Stravinsky in the literature. Whatever the larger problems of his theoretical analysis of the modernist project, Adorno's role as a protagonist in the cross-reflecting discourses of the European émigrés in the 1940s remains a provocatively interesting one. An adviser to Thomas

Mann, who read *Philosophy of New Music* in manuscript during the gestation of Mann's "musical" novel *Doctor Faustus* (1947), Adorno was a theoretical supporter of the scornfully mistrustful Schoenberg, and had once admired Stravinsky. His devastating reexamination of Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music* nevertheless positioned the Russian unequivocally as Schoenberg's other. Neoclassicism in music became, for Adorno, a reflection of authoritarian politics.¹¹ From this perspective, Stravinsky's celebrated belief in music's incapacity to "express" anything¹² started to look like a strikingly compromised version of traditional idealism.

Rather than insuring the purity of his music, Stravinsky, Adorno suggested, had become committed to wholesale evasion. Stylistically divorced from the subject, Stravinsky's music was "absolute" in direct proportion to its evasiveness: "Compositional spontaneity itself is overwhelmed by the prohibition placed upon pathos in expression: the subject, which is no longer permitted to state anything about itself, thus actually ceases to engage in 'production' and must content itself with the hollow echo of objective musical language, which is no longer its own."¹³ Certain aspects of Stravinsky's life and professed beliefs appear to reinforce Adorno's suggestions about his music. His aristocratically refined obsession with orderliness, his opposition to the Russian Revolution and ardent support of Mussolini (to whom he announced in 1935 that he felt "like a fascist myself")¹⁴—all this must confuse either the image of Stravinsky as a leading modernist or the theoretical definition of modernism being employed. The *Symphony in Three Movements* (1945) presents a useful case-study of the problems involved. It even posed some for Adorno, who found in it an almost Beethovenian authenticity ("cleansed of antiquated elements") but considered the "contrived void of its elements" to be typically insufficient: a site where degenerating music could only suggest what it failed to achieve.¹⁵

It is certainly an interesting work. Stravinsky's comments on the symphony imply, with strategic diffidence, that it was (in Robert Craft's phrase) "marked by the impression of world events":

It both does and does not "express my feelings" about them, but I prefer to say only that, without participation of what I think of as my will, they excited my musical imagination. And the events that thus activated me were not general, or ideological, but specific: each episode in the *Symphony* is linked in my imagination with a concrete impression, very often cinematographic in origin, of the war.

The third movement actually contains the genesis of a war plot, though I recognized it as such only after completing the composition. The beginning of the movement is partly, and in some—to me wholly inexplicable—way, a musical reaction to the newsreels and documentaries that I had seen of goose-stepping soldiers. The square march beat, the brass band instrumentation, the grotesque *crescendo* in the tuba, these are all related to those repellant pictures. . . .

But enough of this. In spite of what I have said, the Symphony is not programmatic. Composers combine notes. That is all.¹⁶

What are we to make of this confusing statement? Without it we might have taken the Symphony's finale as a characteristic example of Stravinsky in muscular, energetic mode, as it pounds its way to a final, abstractly bracing tonic-dominant chord of D-flat major. To learn that goose-stepping soldiers, grotesquerie, and "repellant pictures" were involved leads us to wonder about the mentioned "plot"; his claim that the fugue marked the "rise of the Allies" appears to stress the contradictory otherness of what had preceded it.¹⁷ Elsewhere Stravinsky also explained that the second movement had begun life as an embryonic film-score composed, at Franz Werfel's encouragement, for the vision-scene in the screen version of the latter's best-selling, conservative 1941 novel *The Song of Bernadette*.¹⁸ The idea of seeing Jennifer Jones at the grotto of Massabielle in the central section of the Andante (from one bar before cue 124) is as tempting as speculation about the consequent meaning of the *faux-naïf*, rather pastoral folksiness of the outer sections.

Stravinsky's music is richly interesting when it admits to being representationally concrete, but Hollywood understandably chose Alfred Newman to score *The Song of Bernadette* in 1943. Stravinsky's fundamental lack of sympathy with entertainment cinema was confirmed by his sour response to the Disney Studios' use of *Le Sacre du Printemps* for the dinosaur sequence in *Fantasia* (1941). He believed that silent-era Chaplin films alone represented "Hollywood, in its brief age of art."¹⁹ He also, on one occasion, came close to turning on its head Adorno's image of him as the other of the alienated and authentic Schoenberg by hearing the latter's first Chamber Symphony as an eclectic montage of other composers' styles and satirically associating its original scoring with the sound of silent-era cinema orchestras:

I admire the *Kammersymphonie*, but am not attracted by the sound of the solo strings—they remind me of the economy-sized movie-theatre orchestras of the 1920s. . . . At times the *Kammersymphonie* sounds to me like a joint creation of Wagner, Mahler, Brahms and Strauss, as though one of these composers had written the upper line, one the bass etc.²⁰

(Film repeatedly surfaces in discourse about musical values in this period. It was, of course, a pervasively influential new medium, but it seems to have awakened a special kind of fear that readily turned to anger in the laboriously shored-up institution of Great Music.

SCHOENBERG'S REWARDING PAIN

Musicologists' concern with identifiable "techniques" traditionally favored comparisons between composers in this period on purely stylistic grounds. Labels such as "expressionism," "serialism," "neoclassicism," or "postroman-

ticism" have accounted for certain objective features of musical works, which may be arranged taxonomically. More critically constructed categories of modernism are imperfectly (if at all) accommodated in that style-discriminating discourse. The problems posed by objectively defined "modernist" composers in this period and context are nowhere more sharply focused than in the case of Arnold Schoenberg, who took up residence in Brentwood Park, Los Angeles, in 1937.

He commanded nothing like the celebrity of Stravinsky in America. Those who knew his name, or even some of his works, would have been unlikely to regard him as anything other than an extreme, cerebral modernist whose music, apart from the relatively well-known *Verklärte Nacht*, was notoriously "difficult to listen to." An image of unpleasurable dissonance, occasionally associated with the imperfectly comprehended serial or "twelve-tone" system of composition, was as close as popular awareness got to Schoenberg. This, of course, appears to validate Adorno's rigorously searching theoretical vindication and critique of him that formed the major part of *Philosophy of New Music*. Presenting Schoenberg, at his most progressive, as Stravinsky's dialectical other, Adorno discursively pushed Stravinsky back toward the mass-entertainment ethos that he despised. That move is clarified by Adorno's broad categorization of what Schoenberg's music philosophically opposed—a decaying Western civilization which was being systematically infected by the manipulative false consciousness of the "culture industry":

Advanced music has no recourse but to insist upon its own ossification without concession to that would-be humanitarianism which it sees through, in all its attractive and alluring guises, as the mask of inhumanity. Its truth appears guaranteed more by its denial of any meaning in organized society, of which it will have no part—accomplished by its own organized vacuity—than by any capability of positive meaning within itself. Under the present circumstances it is restricted to definitive negation.²¹

Schoenberg was as scornful in his response to *Philosophy of New Music*²² as he was angry at Thomas Mann's appropriation of the twelve-tone system in *Doctor Faustus*. While he occasionally appeared in the 1940s to confirm Adorno's interpretation of his position and significance, the manner in which he did so was paradoxical, to say the least. For example, his short essay "A Self-Analysis," which first appeared in English in 1949, began with the following disarming acceptance of his own musical otherness: "If people speak of me, they at once connect me with horror, with atonality, and with composition with twelve tones."²³

That sense of otherness had been expressed still more strikingly in Schoenberg's 1947 letter of thanks to the National Association of Arts and Letters, which had awarded him a thousand-dollar prize for "outstanding achievement." Explaining his own perception of the artistic course he had

followed, he likened his earliest innovatory works to an "ocean of boiling water" into which he had fallen. He found no assistance but sensed that many would have wished to see him sink: "It might have been to get rid of this nightmare, this unharmonious torture, of these unintelligible ideas, of this methodical madness. . . ." ²⁴

The tone of that sentence is of course ironic, but it demonstrates a remarkable awareness of the primary associative images that were available to a lay audience for his nontonal music: images of physical and mental pain, experienced and inflicted, and of insanity. Still more remarkable is the extent to which such imagery was actually reinforced by the subject matter of many of his textured or dramatic works. These prove to have been far from "organized vacuity" in Adorno's meaning-rejecting sense—a fact of which Adorno was clearly aware in the case of "Expressionist"-era works like *Erwartung* and *Pierrot Lunaire*, whose dramatic narratives he appropriately defined as revelations of the subconscious. Works composed in the 1940s in fact extended the repertoire of images of otherness with which his music might be linked. The op. 44 Prelude for chorus and orchestra of 1945 formed part of a curious biblical project. Nathaniel Shilkret, a popular song writer and light-music director, had conceived the idea of putting the Bible onto records with musical accompaniment. The Genesis section was the only one completed, with background music from a number of "leading composers" of the day, including Stravinsky ("Babel"). Schoenberg elected to provide the prelude: a musical image of Chaos as a serially organized structure with a double-fugue at its center. ²⁵ A similar conjunction of Schoenberg's "progressive" style with images of alienating pain and chaos is found in the 1947 melodrama *A Survivor from Warsaw*, which seems at times to position the orchestral "accompaniment" to the speaker and chorus as if it were a representation of the horror which the protagonist endures. Equally striking was the "inner program" of the purely instrumental String Trio of 1946, written in the hospital in the aftermath of a serious illness during which Schoenberg's heart had briefly stopped. The work appears to have been linked with the condition and its treatment, not least with the bodily intrusions of the doctors. Schoenberg told Hanns Eisler that certain chords represented injections, and was still more forthcoming in conversation with Thomas Mann:

He told me about the new trio he had just completed, and about the experiences he had secretly woven into the composition—experiences of which the work was a kind of fruit. He had, he said, represented his illness and medical treatment in the music including even the male nurses and other oddities of American hospitals. The work was extremely difficult to play, he said, in fact almost impossible, or at least only for three players of virtuoso rank; but, on the other hand, the music was very rewarding because of its extraordinary tonal effects. I worked the association of "impossible but rewarding" into the chapter [of *Doctor Faustus*] on Leverkühn's chamber music. ²⁶

These indications of direct representational intent in Schoenberg are especially interesting. They clearly contrast with the more orthodox idealist disclaimers of Stravinsky, who flirted with representational imagery only to assure us, in the end, of music's naively innocent autonomy ("Composers combine notes. That is all"). This perversely reinforces Adorno's dichotomous interpretation of the two composers' relationship within modernism. Stravinsky is more eloquently in command of the "official" ideology of bourgeois music; Schoenberg appears to unmask its ideological nature by revealing that his own music was indeed representing all the things with which an uninformed popular audience might have associated it. This he does, however, in a private, covert way that emphatically links him with the late nineteenth-century Austrian and German modernists, particularly Mahler. Tensions in Mahler's relations with tradition were often mediated by public ambivalence about expressive representation in the debate for and against "program-music." Note the term "secretly" that Mann attributed to Schoenberg above. My earlier use of the Mahlerian term "inner program" is vindicated by this indication that the claim of nonrepresentational autonomy in that tradition was often no more than a convenient veil drawn over the truthful but embarrassing or even transgressive implications of music. ²⁷

Schoenberg admired Mahler, having had a somewhat disputatious personal relationship with him in his youth. Both Mahler and Strauss (initially supportive of Schoenberg) were "moderns" before the First World War in a manner that was often deemed threatening to the bourgeois values they in fact supported and articulated. Other features of Schoenberg's later aesthetic philosophy tend to emphasize the links between him and the classical tradition, whose technical principles he taught indefatigably at UCLA until his retirement in 1944. Dika Newlin's diaries, recording her experiences in Schoenberg's classes from 1939 and later as a private pupil, amply confirm other testimonies to his characterful, charismatic, and yet ruthless insistence upon his students' mastery of the tonal procedures of the masters (Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms). Only then might they venture to use more "advanced" techniques. His refusal on one occasion even to discuss the tonal implications of the fourths chord seems to have been typical. ²⁸ As a teacher Schoenberg appeared altogether in line with the dominant Western construction of music as a higher art whose mastery was a penitential pilgrimage, accompanied by self-denial and frequent scourgings: a pilgrimage through the established canon designed not least to separate the sheep from the goats on elitist grounds (as Schoenberg resonantly put it in 1947):

No violinist would play, even occasionally, with the wrong intonation to please lower musical tastes, no tight-rope walker would take steps in the wrong direction only for pleasure or personal appeal . . . and in the same manner, no artist, no poet, no philosopher and no musician would degenerate into vul-

garity in order to comply with a slogan such as "Art for All." Because if it is art it is not for all, and if it is for all it is not art. . . . There is only "l'art pour l'art," art for the sake of art alone.²⁹

Was the boiling ocean of Schoenberg's modernist quest an extreme practical interpretation of official bourgeois musical idealism that ended up, rather as with Rachmaninov, tortuously representing its own otherness in an alien world? At the same time, did not the bitterness of Schoenberg's objections to Mann's appropriation of his "intellectual property" in *Doctor Faustus* emphasize the extent to which he relied on the image of the Great European Composer as a heroic subject, storing up his achievements in the course of a life designed for biographical celebration?³⁰ The gap between discursive constructions of Schoenberg's compositional practice—particularly Adorno's—and his actual aesthetic and political views challenges conventional theories about modernism even more than in the case of Stravinsky. (Schoenberg seems to emerge, with all his contradictions, precisely as the culminatory figure of the old Western Great Tradition that he often claimed himself to be—trying to hold on to its culturally dissipated authority in ways that had as much to do with power as with rebellion or subversion. Attempts to resolve the contradictions of his nature via the decontextualizing discourses of psychoanalysis or visionary spirituality are strategically unconvincing.³¹

Schoenberg's secret representational intentions unmask the deception of the mystically revealed and yet unrepresentable truth upon which his unfinished opera *Moses und Aron* had turned. Adorno has been accused of misrepresenting the actual programmatic intentions and world view of Gustav Mahler,³² but oddly not those of Schoenberg, whose disarming admission of 1950 seems to address more than a McCarthyite threat to himself and his family: "... before I was twenty-five, I had already discovered the difference between me and a labourer. I then found out that I was *bourgeois* and turned away from all political contacts."³³ Adorno should have been in a position to see that pre-First World War "opposition" to the bourgeois tradition often expressed itself in ways which were wholly bourgeois, their romantic notion of mystical inspiration linking the unfettered artist with some higher realm of subjectively mediated truth. His understanding of Schoenbergian expressionism nevertheless seems implicitly reliant upon documents like the idealistic letter the composer wrote to the painter Wassily Kandinsky in 1911. Here the aristocratic Walther von Stolzing of Wagner's *Meistersinger*, rather than any anarchic agitator, seems to hover before his inner eye: "Every formal procedure which aspires to traditional effects is not completely free from conscious motivation. But art belongs to the *unconscious*! One must express *oneself*! Express oneself *directly*! Not one's taste, or one's

upbringing, or one's intelligence, knowledge or skill. Not all these *acquired* characteristics, but that which is *inborn, instinctive*."³⁴

To celebrate Schoenberg's "fracturedness" as the measure of his status as a modernist, of his music as critique, is to miss the power and significance of his own belief that his music was in fact as exemplary in its organic unity and logical order as music of the Great Tradition was always supposed to be, and no less secretly representational. In 1949 he protested his case in the following peculiar manner:

... a satisfactory number of first-class musicians . . . were able to recognize that logic, order and organization will be greatly promoted by application of the method of composing with twelve tones.

Even under Hitler, twelve-tone music was not suppressed, as I have learned. On the contrary it was compared to the idea of "Der Fuehrer" by the German composer, Paul von Klenau. . . .³⁵

Schoenberg's unlikely achievement was not to salvage some newly autonomous music from the chaos of subjective representation so much as to demonstrate the resilience of bourgeois ideology as encoded in official European music-aesthetic theory. But in the Emerald City tradition was also a movie set that was never quite as it tried to appear. Behind the monstrous image of Dorothy's wizard lurked a vulnerably human figure. In a 1947 letter to the conductor Hans Rosbaud, Schoenberg, the boggy-man of European modernism, made the following touching announcement: "... there is nothing I long for more intensely (if for anything) than to be taken for a better sort of Tchaikovsky—for heaven's sake: a bit better, but really that's all. Or if anything more, then that people should know my tunes and whistle them."³⁶

The alienation expressed here is, once again, not at all of the Adornian kind. (It is that of an artist who had realized that the values which he had sought to articulate and by which he believed his own development to have been validated were no longer the dominant currency in this other culture.) He had painfully rediscovered himself as just another foreign composer without an audience. History nevertheless fails to record his response to the society hostess who, one glittering night at Ira Gershwin's, approached him with the no doubt innocent and well-intentioned invitation: "Give us a tune, Arnold."³⁷ That, it appears, was what part of him had wanted to do all along; that was why his expressionist works were such authentic manifestations of (self-imposed) pain—its rationale an extreme form of subjective individualism that was rooted in the culture it appeared resolutely to oppose.

For someone who almost regretfully succeeded where Schoenberg self-destructively failed, we might finally turn to another Viennese-Jewish émigré,

a composer who by all standard criteria would have to be regarded as the Rachmaninov to Schoenberg's Stravinsky. This was Erich Wolfgang Korngold.

KORNGOLD'S PLEASURE, AND DECEPTION

Korngold's name was less likely to be encountered in serious musical circles than that of Rachmaninov, or even of an admired American aspirant to seriousness like George Gershwin (with whom Schoenberg played tennis). The reasons were historical. While not a representative of patronizable popular culture in quite the accepted sense, Korngold had long been an admirer of Richard Strauss and Puccini; his own late-romantic style was clearly influenced by them. He had begun his career as a child-prodigy composer in pre-First World War Vienna, earning the approval of Mahler, lessons from Schoenberg's friend Alexander Zemlinsky, and the fascinated adoration of audiences, who were astounded by such works as his ballet-pantomime *Der Schneemann* (The Snowman), performed at the Vienna Court Opera when he was thirteen years old. The young Korngold then went on to commit the unpardonable sin of maintaining the momentum of his early successes by becoming one of the most popular of living German composers after Richard Strauss. Frequent performances of his chamber, operatic, and orchestral works often exasperated the Schoenberg circle, whose wrath must have been further inflamed when the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* ran a 1930 poll of its readers on how they ranked prominent Austrians in various walks of life. Of the composers cited, Richard Strauss (who was in fact Bavarian) came first, Korngold second, and Schoenberg third.³⁸ Korngold had the further misfortune to be the son of one of Vienna's leading music critics: the conservative, antimodernist successor to Hanslick on the *Neue Freie Presse*, Dr. Julius Korngold. The younger Korngold's crimes against higher artistic ideals, let alone those of serious-minded modernists, were further compounded by the fact that he succeeded where both Schoenberg (who made ridiculous financial demands) and Stravinsky inevitably failed: he became a successful film-music composer. His tunes were sufficiently whistleable for them to become major selling features of some of the Warner Brothers movie hits of the 1930s and early 1940s.

He had started in 1934 by extending and arranging Mendelssohn's music for Max Reinhardt's film *A Midsummer Night's Dream*;³⁹ in that role he was just one of the many Europeans drafted in to add "tone," a touch of "class" to Hollywood's lucrative popular productions. Soon he had been drawn into scoring action-adventures. He resisted and protested his ideals, as any self-respecting European composer could be expected to do; but he was good at his job, although he affected to despise it. In 1938 the German annexation of Austria sealed his fate and forced him to remain in Hollywood to score another hated "action-picture," whose commission he had initially declined:

The Adventures of Robin Hood, with Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland.⁴⁰ That won him an Academy Award. Settled in Beverly Hills, Korngold and his wife, Luzi, applied themselves to helping family and friends to leave Austria. His children were brought to safety, then his parents. Julius Korngold thus virtually became a neighbor of his old adversary, Schoenberg, while the name of his more amiable son began to appear in the pages of Thomas Mann's diary, as it would figure later in Alma Mahler-Werfel's record of her years in Los Angeles.⁴¹ The Korngolds even found themselves socializing with Schoenberg and his family.

In her biography of her husband, Luzi Korngold observes that she did not know what Schoenberg thought of her husband's compositions.⁴² Erich, who admired Schoenberg but found his music alien and unsympathetic,⁴³ could readily have suggested what he *should* have thought. Korngold's perception of his own Hollywood scores was that they were indeed "not serious," that they were simply a way of earning money until the war ended. Only then, he said, could he conceive of composing "for himself" once more. The power of the inherited, linked discourses of European high art and modernism is demonstrated in his shared sense of precisely the kind of alienation that Rachmaninov came to feel. It had impressed itself upon Korngold even before his first Hollywood trip in 1934. His father had chronicled his son's growing depression in an idiosyncratic journal (it is essentially a biography of him):

He had already been touched by both open and covert opposition of the kind that the Third Reich sought to establish within music. Against his inclination and commitment, the former prodigy of unusual modernity had become associated with developments in respected, older music; at least he had not turned into some finicky "new music" man, groping his way into chaos. The result: ostracism by the closing ranks of the partisan coteries of artists, performers, and critics. "Why write operas, why compose in such times?"—these expressions of resignation, coming from one usually so cheerful and creatively unconstrained, affected me painfully.⁴⁴

What Korngold became involved in during the period of this disillusionment was a form of popular music; he had made almost a new career for himself as an arranger and reviser of "golden era" Viennese operettas. He had, in other words, stepped back even further than Richard Strauss after *Elektra* from the challenge of so-called "advanced" music. His links with the world of popular culture, later specifically with the emergent world of cinematic mass entertainment, were to grow ever stronger.

As a film composer Korngold took the final step into a kind of music that represented the converse of all that European Great Music, traditional or modernist, was supposed to be, from the perspective of an Adorno, a Schoenberg, or even a Stravinsky. Film music was the antithesis of the idealized art of both the traditionalists and the modernists, and their journalistic and aca-

democratic supporters. It was a commodity produced to commission, often at great speed. Demanding the converse of heroic individualism, it required the composer to lose most of his autonomy by becoming part of a production-team in which his cherished control and status as author were eroded by sound producers, staff orchestrators, and directors. Furthermore, it dealt openly in representation, drawing upon a rich, often suspect repertoire of nineteenth-century operatic and programmatic musical signification in scores whose form was blurred and confused by the fade-out, whose expressive subject-position slipped manipulatively between the multiple specificity of individual characters and metanarrative generalization. The "badness" and institutionalized otherness of such music were so ingrained as valuations that it came to be ignored by virtually all of the histories of twentieth-century music (along with most of the music of popular culture, of course).

Korngold was himself disparaging about his elaborate, voluble scores for historical action pictures. Their extension of the techniques of the already marginalized European world of protocinematic popular opera and operetta is nevertheless interesting. *Captain Blood*, *Anthony Adverse*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* could all be analyzed as spoken grand operas, with love scenes, arias, choruses, processions, and even orchestral interludes. Sometimes the music will be unbroken for periods of twenty minutes or more; it heralds, frames and adds luster to the whole product as well as referentially shadowing, sometimes projecting or anticipating its events and moods. Still more interesting things happen in his generally less well-known, melodramatic, at times almost expressionistic scores for *King's Row* (1942), the remake of *Between Two Worlds* (1944), and *Deception*, for which Korngold wrote his last original score in 1946—the year of Schoenberg's String Trio, the year in which Mann finished *Doctor Faustus* and the war in Europe ended. Its title appropriately signals its particular relevance to my present theme.

Deception is a love-triangle melodrama which also belongs to the genre of "artist-movies" or "musician-movies," which seems to have reflected a rather complex Hollywood wartime policy of idealizing while ostensibly democratizing conventional European high culture and its values. The complexity derives from the fact that those values were becoming globally somewhat foreign to a general public whose tastes were both manipulated and represented by Hollywood in narratives about artistic pleasure and aspirations. [Classical music, great literature, European languages and accents coalesced into an image of a privileged realm that was attainable only by the gifted few] ("artists, people like us," as Bette Davis puts it in *Deception*).⁴⁵ At the same time that realm was growing temporally as well as geographically more distant, out of practical reach or detailed comprehension. Madame von Eln in *King's Row* represents an emblematically foreign figure in small-town America, speaking in French to her young charge, the piano-playing and intellectually gifted

Parris. Moved by the eventually disclosed news of Madame von Eln's fatal cancer, Colonel Skeffington muses aloud: "When she passes, how much passes with her—a whole way of life: a way of gentleness and honor and dignity. These things are going . . . and they may never come back to this world." In *King's Row*, "these things" seem unequivocally associated with European high culture, ancestral wealth, and aristocratic manners.

This popular idealization of European culture is partly undermined by its association with the past, with something that is dying. That association permitted alternative, more critical resonances and implications to fill the spaces where "higher" artistic strategizing was often precluded by brutal deadlines. In *Deception* the tension between conventional aesthetic ideology and its more distanced critical reflection is of particular interest in that all three main characters are musicians of European origin. At the start of the film two lovers, presented as having been uprooted and separated by the war, are reunited in a New York concert hall. Bette Davis's Christine had arrived first, hoping to be followed by cellist Karel Novak (Paul Henreid); only at the end of the war, however, had he arrived to try to reestablish his career in America and to find Christine. A poster has led her to the hall, where she arrives as he is playing the finale of Haydn's D-major Cello Concerto.

Korngold, himself an Austrian émigré, provided a remarkable score for the film, in which long stretches of diegetic classical music (Haydn, Schubert, Beethoven) threaten almost to usurp his "background" music, although a composition of his own subsequently plays a special part in that process. A clear distinction is nevertheless maintained between the realm of the classics and Korngold's characteristic late-romantic sound and style. The dialectic of their respective otherness is emphasized no less than is that between the world of the classical concert, at the beginning, and that of the city outside: Davis and Henreid exit the hall into an almost Ivesian montage of cab whistles, a Salvation-Army band, and traffic noise. Such contrasts and oppositions are explored by the film in a kind of aural subtext to its revelations about "artistic" behavior.

At first there is the title music, featuring a typically post-Straussian skyrocket of a theme that leaps improvisationally heavenwards as the word "Deception" fills the screen. The theme rapidly sinks into a protracted, dark-hued cadence, brooded over by a tolling bell as the titles give way to a long shot of a rainswept street and what looks like the façade of a church. Bette Davis climbs up the steps (it is a temple of art) and the background music is replaced by a plush silence, defined by the distant sound of classical concert music. Her susceptibility to it is ostensibly stressed in the first close-up. The camera finds her shadowed face high at the back of the hall; is it personal or purely aesthetic emotion that has brought tears to her eyes as she gazes longingly, sadly down at the platform? A huge pipe-organ rears up there, visually explaining the solemnity of the musicians.

Authentic classical music is presented as social and serious. In contrast, the "background" music is interpreted ever more deliberately as the deceptive, sentimentally oceanic image of a gendered subjectivity. This is a woman's music; it emanates from Christine and seems to engulf Karel as she strives to dispel his jealous doubts and assure him that they are truly united in love. This music seems to be constructed as "woman" in the bad old patriarchal sense that has been unmasked by Susan McClary; music that is dangerous and threatening in its siren-promise of perfect bliss. The musical plot is further thickened, however, by the cause of Christine's deception: the haughty "great composer," Alexander Hollenius (played in fine style by Claude Rains). He had adopted aspiring pianist Christine as his protégée and mistress. She plays, in fact, just once in the film (the *Appassionata*, at the party after her marriage to Karel), but Hollenius interrupts by breaking a wine glass in his jealously tense and angry hand. She covers for him by suggesting, deceptively as ever, that his sensitivity to music is to blame. She had become the muse to his creations (of course), the most recent of which, a cello concerto, he uses as a counter in the game of threatened revelation that he plays with Christine and her new husband, from whom she strives to conceal the truth of her former relationship with its composer.

Korngold's complicity with the ever more ambivalent positioning of his "own" music in the film is complicated by the fact that he published the one-movement Hollenius piece as his op. 37 Cello Concerto in C major. Denied any semiotically revealing links with the main thematic and motivic material of the rest of the score, it is a work whose closed form frames rich, postromantic lyricism within stretches of purposefully energetic contrapuntal passagework that are closer to Hindemith than to Rachmaninov. While in musical terms the Concerto thus seems judiciously autonomous, that very autonomy is interpreted within the film in such a way as to problematize Korngold's employment of the work in his doomed postwar attempt to reestablish his career as a "serious" concert composer. In *Deception* the Concerto is revealingly positioned not only as a man's music, but also as the music of a very particular kind of man, who is marked by all the popular signifiers of "high art" that the film subjects to historicizing critique. Hollenius, Christine tells Karel, is "rich, immensely rich, like a king!" When we see him at home, it is in a sumptuously furnished studio, looking like Wagner's drawing room at Wahnfried—silk dressing-gown, potted palms, rich drapery, and "art" everywhere. The imperialist implications of his aristocratic decadence are stressed by the presence of an oriental servant; a Siamese cat purrs in the great man's lap. "Sooner or later," he tells Christine after her wedding, "you'll realize that nothing really matters but music—and me." Aesthetic idealism seems conclusively unmasked as an instrument of patriarchal domination.

The point is further stressed by Hollenius's use of the Concerto in his dealings with Karel Novak, who becomes vulnerable to attacks and put-downs of

a particularly effective kind when rehearsing and performing the piece under Hollenius's masterful baton. Furthermore, when we first see Hollenius playing it on the piano in his studio, where he is surprised by Christine's unannounced arrival, it appears unequivocally and expressionistically linked to his anger and sense of betrayal. He plays its ending as if he meant to kill.

There is something slightly corny and compromised about the dialectic thus set up between the great male composer—whose concerto is, of course, played brilliantly by Karel at the end—and his desired other in Christine, whose nondiegetic "inner" music is consistently presented as self-indulgent, its deceptiveness of a fundamentally honest and thus self-consciously authentic type. The film's dénouement nevertheless focuses the implied subtext. Visiting Hollenius on her way to the Concerto performance that he is to conduct (Karel had gone on earlier), Christine fails to win from him the assurance that he is not planning to tell all after the concert. She shoots him and leaves the gun near the body to make it look like suicide. Feminized mass culture finally puts paid to patriarchal European high culture, but might well have to pay the price. Her distraught revelation in Karel's dressing-room after the concert seems to prepare us for an arrest-of-the-fallen-woman scene, until Karel (another cliché looms: the man corrupted by the femme fatale) wonders if they might yet escape the clutches of the law and maintain the deception that Hollenius died by his own hand. For a moment, Bette Davis's look, as a well-wisher greets their hurried departure with "You must be the happiest woman in the world!" threatens to sunder her from her recurring, now more purposefully cadencing music, first heard in the titles. It also, however, begins to sound more defiant than deceptive, almost transgressively aware of the responsibility it has assumed. While completing the score, Korngold might justifiably have felt a sense of common purpose with Rachmaninov as his pen turned momentarily into a gun in a feminine-looking hand, the hovering images of Schoenberg and Stravinsky merging before him into one that bore a curious likeness to Claude Rains.

A FINAL REFLECTION

The familiar historical narrative of the advance of modernism has often assumed the character of an imperial or colonial history: strategically marginalizing and diminishing different or dissenting voices as those of the conquered and the outmoded. The uprooted European artists and intellectuals of 1940s Los Angeles blamed that city, and Hollywood in particular, for a destructive levelling and blurring of distinctions.⁴⁶ The fear behind the blame was that the traditional social function and ideology of high art, of which avant-garde modernism was really an integral part, was threatened by the resultant clarification of the oppositions of power and gender which had defined its discourse. *Deception's* part in that clarification is summed up in

an emblematic moment when Bette Davis actually encounters and seems momentarily to question her own image in a mirror before setting out to shoot a composer. No less questioningly might a critical, postmodernist musicology confront the institutionalized history of Twentieth-Century Music. Wary of ideological snares, its authors long remained cautious about politically committed composers of the Left like Kurt Weill and Hanns Eisler, whose own experiences of American exile form a different, if related, story to the one sketched here. Meanwhile, anxiously deployed strategies of marginalizing scorn and self-critical apologetics generated a complex discursive accompaniment to the unmasking of high art in and as the popular culture it had long feared and despised. The trading of constructions of modernism between Stravinsky and Schoenberg against Rachmaninov and Korngold marked a significant stage in the decline and transformation of European music's "good old tradition" as part of it slipped out of the downtown concert hall and into the local cinema.

NOTES

1. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985* (London: Turnaround, 1992), 15.
2. Ibid., 16.
3. See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Macmillan, 1988).
4. Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 351. I have adopted "Rachmaninov" as the most widely used transliteration; formerly current spellings of his name have been retained in quotations.
5. Rachmaninov's Prelude in C-sharp Minor is treated in scorching style in Theodor Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992), 38-40.
6. Quoted in Bertensson and Leyda, *Rachmaninoff*, 363-64.
7. See Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 263-64, 269ff.
8. Bertensson and Leyda, *Rachmaninoff*, 309.
9. Ibid., 374.
10. See Stravinsky in *Conversation with Robert Craft* (London: Pelican Books, 1962), "Conversations with Igor Stravinsky," 55-56.
11. Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (a strict translation of the German title would be "Philosophy of New Music"), trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Bloomster (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), 209.
12. The clearest formulation of that position had appeared in Stravinsky's *Chronique de ma vie* in 1936, reprinted as *An Autobiography* (London: Calder and Boyars Ltd., 1975), 53 ("I consider that music is, by its very nature, powerless to express anything at all. . .").
13. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 181-82.

14. See Harvey Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 168.
15. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 211.
16. See Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues* (London: Faber, 1982), 50-52.
17. Ibid., 51.
18. See Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (London: Faber, 1981), 77.
19. For Stravinsky's response to *Fantasia*, see *ibid.*, 145-46; the comment about Chaplin films appears in Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (London: Faber, 1981), 109.
20. See Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, 106n2. Stravinsky's own analysis of the difference between him and Schoenberg is set out there on 107-8.
21. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 20.
22. See H. H. Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work*, trans. Humphrey Searle (London: John Calder, 1977), 508.
23. In *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein (London: Faber, 1975), 76.
24. See Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 545-46. The text of what was in fact a recorded message, played in his absence, also appears, slightly differently arranged on the page, in *Arnold Schoenberg Letters*, 245-46.
25. I refer here particularly to Eric Salzman's note "Prelude to the Genesis Suite" in the leaflet accompanying the 1965 CBS recording under Robert Craft: *The Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, vol. 2 (BRG/SBRG 72268).
26. Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), 172. The English translation, by H. T. Lowe-Porter, of *Doctor Faustus* (chapter 43) renders the phrase as "impossible but refreshing" in the section on Leverkühn's Trio. The comment to Eisler about the injection chords is recorded in Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 479.
27. Precisely relevant here is Schoenberg's revelation in 1940 that his First String Quartet (op. 7) had a "very definite—but private!" program; see Dika Newlin, *Schoenberg Remembered: Diaries and Recollections (1938-76)* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1980), 193.
28. Ibid., 96.
29. *Style and Idea*, 123-24.
30. On the Schoenberg-Mann controversy about *Doctor Faustus*, see Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, 32-33; the "Author's Note" appended to all editions of the novel (where the twelve-tone system is acknowledged to be "the intellectual property . . . of Arnold Schoenberg"); *Arnold Schoenberg Letters*, 255; Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 491-92.
31. I say this notwithstanding the interesting arguments developed in Alexander Ringer, *Arnold Schoenberg: The Composer as Jew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). The specific tendency to "explain" Schoenberg psychoanalytically, or in terms of his Jewish background, seems to have been followed by Ringer, Reinhold Brinkman, and others at the 1991 Los Angeles conference "Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture—Vienna, Berlin and Los Angeles." See Charlotte M. Cross's report in *Current Musicology* 54 (1993): 88-93.

32. See Constantin Floros: "Zur Wirkungsgeschichte Gustav Mahlers" in *Fragment of Completion? Proceedings of the Mahler X Symposium*, Utrecht 1986, ed. Paul Op de Coul (The Hague: Universitaire Pers Rotterdam, 1991), 188.

33. *Style and Idea*, 505.

34. Jelena Hahl-Koch, ed., *Arnold Schoenberg/Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures and Documents*, trans. John C. Crawford (London: Faber, 1984), 23. Emphasis in original.

35. Egbert M. Ennulat, *Arnold Schoenberg Correspondence* (London: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1991), 260–61. See also *Style and Idea*, 249–50 ("Is it Fair?" 1947). An earlier (1931) assertion of the specific "Germanness" of his own music appears there on 173.

36. *Arnold Schoenberg Letters*, 243.

37. John Russell Taylor, *Strangers in Paradise: The Hollywood Émigrés 1933–1950* (London: Faber, 1983), 210.

38. Brendan Carroll, *The Last Prodigy: A Biography of Erich Wolfgang Korngold* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1997), 211. See also Hans Moldenhauer, *Anton Webern—A Chronicle of His Life and Works* (London: Gollancz, 1978), 140.

39. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle (Warner Brothers, 1935).

40. Korngold's initial letter to Hal Wallis, declining the commission, appears in Rudy Behlmer, *Inside Warner Bros (1935–1951)* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 52–53.

41. See Alma Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge Is Love: Memories of a Lifetime* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 258, 277.

42. See Luzi Korngold, *Erich Wolfgang Korngold* (Vienna: Elisabeth Lafite/Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1967), 71.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Julius Korngold, *Die Korngolds in Wien: Die Musikkritiker und das Wunderkind* (Zürich: M & T Verlag, 1991), 363.

45. All quotations from films are transcribed by the author.

46. See Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Vintage, 1992), 18.